MEMO REPORT SUBJECT: Standards for Contract Farm Laborers 2/19/57

LOWER HOUSING STANDARDS FOR MIGRANTS FOUGHT

Strongly backed by organized labor, especially in California, the Department of Labor is standing firm against efforts by corporation farmers to get a relaxation of government regulations of migrant farm labor camps.

The California State Assembly and the Texas Senate adopted resolutions denouncing the Department's labor camp regulations as unnecessarily stringent, and the California body urged that this State's housing standards be recognized as the standard of housing of Mexican nationals, with enforcement by the State division of housing.

Despite the complaints, the Department of Labor has announced there is no likelihood the new regulations, which went into effect in early January, will be eased.

Labor has long complained that the use of Mexican nationals on American farms is depressing the wages and eliminating job possibilities for domestic workers who cannot or will not work for wage scales acceptable to Mexican workers.

While wage scales for Mexican nationals working on U.S. farms are low, farmers are required to provide housing for the Mexicans.

California State Federation of Labor President Thomas L. Pitts attacked the efforts to lower standards for this housing of braceros, declaring "big coproration farms apparently feel they can get away with providing labor camps below minimum standards of decency more easily under State than federal regulations."

"If the costs for labor camps can be reduced", Pitts warned, "it will mean that even more domestic agricultural workers will be replaced by cheap labor from Mexico since the housing requirements now are at least a partial deterrent to an almost unlimited use of braceros for farm work."

Write to Phil Bushnik for identification.

Shay Ired, Urges Fight On Farm Labor Rules

A state farm leader voiced indignation yesterday in Los Angeles as he discussed new Federal restrictions on housing for Mexican contract laborers.

Frank M. Shay, chairman of the State Chamber of Commerce's agricultural committee, told a Chamber meeting that farmers face five years in prison and fines of $10,000 unless they comply with the new regulations.

Shay, also president of the Prune & Apricot Growers Assn., San Jose, warned that the Federal Government has employed a large staff of insepctors to make sure that California farmers toe the mark.

He complained that the new Federal requirements demand:

1. Public sewer systems, even if existing private systems are adequate;

2. Drinking water, bathing water and laundry water approved by health authorities;

3. All labor camps be in compliance with city or county building codes and fire prevention ordinances;

4. Removal of all labor camps which now are adjacent to streets or heavily traveled roads;

5. At least two exits for all one-story buildings used by 10 or more persons.

Shay urged farmers and legislators to fight against the new restrictions.